

July 3, 2019

To the Board of Governors of the Maritime Conservatory of Performing Arts:

We, the undersigned, are greatly concerned about the threat to the very existence of the Maritime Conservatory of Performing Arts and its heritage building, an institution whose high standards both in artistic training and in the public presentation of live performances in music and dance have played an indispensable role in the cultural enrichment of our community's quality of life.

Housed in a building of intrinsic value and historic significance on Chebucto Road (originally the Chebucto Road School), the Conservatory has been a fixture of the city's cultural scene for 132 years. It is attended by approximately 1200 music and dance students, with a teaching staff of nearly 70 faculty members. In addition, there are many additional stakeholders including Cecilia Concerts, Opera Nova Scotia, Women for Music, Aeolian Singers, St. John's United Church, and the Bowed Instrument Shop, all of whom use space at the Conservatory. Finally, but not to be forgotten, is the general public who attend the dozens of concerts presented each year in the Lilian Piercey Concert Hall and who have come to rely upon and treasure this fine performance venue. [1]

Contrary to what faculty and stakeholders are being told, discussions between the Conservatory's Board of Governors and developer Danny Chedrawe have been ongoing since at least 2017 and continue to the present time. Due to the lack of transparency and communication between the Board and Faculty, and between the Board and the MCPA Association, there is concern that these negotiations may be much further along than reported. [2]

Evidence of enormous interest in the future of the Conservatory is demonstrated by the 6,000 plus signatures on the Change.org petition to keep the institution within its current historic building on Chebucto Road (<http://chnng.it/sT7zKgMKHn>).

Ifan Williams, former Artistic and Administrative director (1998-2009) who was responsible for the acquisition and partial restoration of the building as well as the creation of The Lilian Piercey Concert Hall, has argued that building ownership is important for the long term stability of the institution and that it should therefore be retained and restoration resumed. He has also noted that "The Lilian Piercey Concert Hall has been a major contributor to the resurrection of the Conservatory's reputation since the crisis period of 1998 and it will not be possible to create a similar facility elsewhere."

Following the sale of the building to the Conservatory by the City in 2000, the Conservatory met its obligation to the City to provide restoration to a minimum value of \$650,000.[3] Raising the necessary funds to refurbish and repair what continues to be a structurally sound building is a major function of the Board of Governors who have been ineffective in fulfilling this critical aspect of their mandate. In addition, they have thus far failed to disclose the rationale regarding the financial advantage of selling rather than restoring the building. [4]

Several weeks ago, the Conservatory's Board of Governors made a statement to the CBC saying that they have every intention of inviting discussion before any decision is made on the fate of the Maritime Conservatory. However, given the ongoing lack of transparency, communication and accountability of the Board, we demand that the Board of Governors immediately convene an Open Public Forum about the future of the Conservatory and its present building, with an independent chair, to which all interested parties will be invited. We believe this must be done before any further discussions take place with Westwood Developments Limited and before any final decisions are made that could have negative ramifications across the city and province.

Yours truly,

Ross Brown (former Chair, MCPA)  
 Barbara Butler (Artistic Director, Musique Royale)  
 Jules Chamberlain (Chair, Cecilia Concerts)  
 Simon Docking (Assistant Artistic and Managing Director, Scotia Festival of Music)  
 Edith Hancock (President, MCPA Association)  
 Janice Jackson (Vocalist, Artistic Director - Vocalypse Productions)  
 Dr. Walter H. Kemp (Artistic and Administrative Director, Opera Nova Scotia)  
 Kaye Pottie (former Supervisor of Music in the Schools; former Chair, MCPA)  
 Hugh Vincent (former Chair, MCPA)  
 Shimon Walt (Assistant Principal Cello, SNS; and Walt Music)  
 Ifan Williams (former Artistic and Administrative Director, MCPA)

CC: The Hon. Stephen McNeil, Premier of Nova Scotia; The Hon. Zach Churchill, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development; The Hon. Leo A. Glavine, Minister of Communities, Culture and Heritage; The Hon. Tony Ince, Minister of African Nova Scotian Affairs; Gary Burrill, MLA Halifax Chebucto and all other MLAs in HRM and surrounding areas  
 Mike Savage, Mayor of Halifax, and all City Councillors  
 President, Nova Scotia Registered Music Teachers Association; President, Nova Scotia Music Educators Association (NSTU); President, Women for Music;  
 Director, Fountain School of Performing Arts, Dalhousie University; Director, School of Music, Acadia University; Head, Department of Music, Saint Francis Xavier University; Head, Department of Music, Mount Allison University; Artistic Director, Lunenburg Academy of Music Performance; President, Seniors College Association of Nova Scotia (SCANS)  
 CEO, Symphony Nova Scotia; Executive Director, Debut Atlantic; Chairman of the Board, Les jeunesses musicales Canada; President, l'Alliance Française de Halifax; NS Kiwanis Music

Festival; Executive Director, Theatre Nova Scotia; Artistic Director, Maritime Concert Opera Society; President, Dartmouth Community Concert Association  
Producer, Information Morning, CBC Radio; Producer, Mainstreet, CBC Radio; CBC-TV Halifax; CTV Atlantic News  
Editor, Halifax Chronicle Herald Newspaper; Editor, The Coast; Publisher, Halifax Examiner;  
Andrew MacDonald, The MacDonald Notebook

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## FOOTNOTES

1. The Lilian Piercey Concert Hall is widely acknowledged by many world-class musicians in Halifax and across Canada to have the best acoustics of any music venue in Halifax and beyond. The loss of this extraordinary music venue would be devastating for all stakeholders and would impoverish the cultural life of the City. As Barbara Butler, Artistic and Managing Director of Musique Royale has written: "There is no finer acoustical space in Halifax. It will not be replaced, no matter what the cost, by a developer's concept within a modern facility on Almon Street. The city of Halifax entrusted the care of this historic facility to the Maritime Conservatory of Performing Arts. I hope imaginative and creative minds are allowed to be heard in whatever decisions lay ahead."
2. As reported in the Macdonald Notebook online journal dated May 5, 2018: "William Webster, chairman of the historic Maritime Conservatory of Performing Arts, confirms that the future of its 130-year-old building on Chebucto Road is under discussion." Later in 2018, Mr. Macdonald wrote: "Multiple sources inform The Macdonald Notebook that Chedrawe is anxious to take over the imposing red brick structure, and has offered the conservatory a new home in his future high rise development at the former Acadian Lines bus depot on Almon Street." In the Chronicle Herald just last week, Mr. Chedrawe was quoted as saying (contradicting Dr. Webster's earlier statement on CTV that Mr. Chedrawe approached the Conservatory with a proposal), "I've never had a discussion with them regarding their property."
3. See Addendum for background information about the sale of the building by the City in 2000 to The Maritime Conservatory and the public's significant financial investment in its refurbishment, including the restorative creation of the Lilian Piercey Concert Hall.
4. Leasing costs in Mr. Chedrawe's new building on Almon Street are currently estimated at between \$250,000 and \$350,000 per annum, plus maintenance of utilities and infrastructure in that part of the building intended for training in dance and music, and costs related to special requirements within the construction planning design that would be required for Conservatory needs. These costs would not even include the incalculable expense of recreating a performance space even remotely comparable to the Lilian Piercey Concert Hall. These costs would jeopardize the financial ability of the Conservatory to maintain its educational program. Many are rightly concerned that the

financial burdens resulting from this relocation will lead to the demise of the institution itself.

## ADDENDUM

Since the sale in 1939 of its first home which it had owned jointly with the then Halifax Ladies' College, the Conservatory had a peripatetic existence until 1997. In the intervening half-century, the Conservatory moved every few years from rented space to rented space, none of them adequate. Usually there was no auditorium (essential for a performing arts institution). A lack of teaching space also meant that throughout this period it was necessary to have satellite locations spread throughout the region. Finally, in 1997, the Maritime Conservatory relocated to the former Chebucto Road School. In the following year, Ifan Williams was appointed interim director (later to become Artistic and Administrative director) and after thoroughly examining the building put forward a proposal to the City to take over all three buildings on the property. His proposal was taken off the agenda when the Muslim community, who were renting the other two buildings, objected. The City issued a new Request for Proposal, and a joint proposal from the Conservatory and Muslim Community was put forward: The Muslim community would put up a cash component in the amount of \$175,000 and occupy two of the buildings, and the Conservatory promised a degree of restoration (minimum of \$650,000) and occupy the main building. The restorative effort attracted numerous donations/sponsorships, including from Lilian Piercey, the Hugh Vincent family, Hazel Paul and many others, and ended up including the restorative creation of the Lilian Piercey Concert Hall. Practice and teaching rooms were named for each major sponsor (for instance, Judith Grant, Shirley Blois Lindsay, James Burchill and so on).

The Conservatory was created by, and operates under, an Act of the Nova Scotia Legislature, since amended several times. Like the province's universities, MCPA has a Board of Governors that elects its own members who, formally, are the only "members" of the organization and the only individuals with voting rights in matters relating to its governance; to quote the Board's By-Law, C4, "Membership: There is no membership in the Conservatory other than on the Board of Governors." It should be noted as well that, according to By-Law E1: "There shall be no less [sic] than five Governors with voting privileges."

Until fairly recently, the membership of the Board of Governors - like the Boards of the province's universities - included as voting members representatives elected by other groups within the Conservatory community including the Faculty Association and the Alumni

Association (more recently called the MCPA Association), but this is no longer the case. As a result, all decisions about the governance of the MCPA are made by the small number of elected Board members. The Board of Governors must, of course, follow their By-Laws, created and amended by them exclusively, but there seems to be little that could be done if they were not to do so (e.g., if they were to fail to hold an AGM, were to hold the AGM later than the required date, were to fail to give required notice of the AGM, or were to have fewer than the number of voting members required by their By-Laws).